

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MANAGERS' VIEWS TOWARD THE RECREATIONAL FEE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM - 1997

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Monitoring the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program

Congress authorized the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program in section 315 of the Omnibus Consolidated Rescissions Act of 1996 and amended the program under Public Laws 104-134. These actions mandated the implementation of a Recreational Fee Demonstration Program by the National Park Service (NPS) and the three other federal land management agencies. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management). Under this program, the NPS retains 100% of the revenues it generates by Fee Demonstration Projects, with 80% of the revenues retained by the collecting unit. The law requires a three-year, evaluation of the impacts of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program on the management and visitation patterns at these local units.

This Executive Summary highlights the opinions and perceptions of park managers regarding the effects of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program on park visitation. Also summarized are their views about implementation and management of the program within park operations for calendar 1997. The results

are based on a survey of managers at parks included in the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program.

MANAGEMENT PERCEPTION OF IMPACT ON VISITATION PATTERNS

Annual Visitation Variation Due to Normal Fluctuations, Not New Fees

87% of park managers indicate a change has occurred in total annual visitation in 1997, compared with the previous year. 48% of the park managers indicate visitation increased, while 39% indicate visitation decreased. Explanations for these changes include seasonal patterns and normal year-to-year fluctuations. 6% of park managers perceive that the new fees may have resulted in a decline in park visitation.

Visitation Patterns Not Affected by New Fees

75% of the managers feel that the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program had no effect on visitation patterns, such as number of visitors coming to their park by season of the year, or on weekend versus weekday visitation. 15% of the respondents believe the fee increase caused a shift in visitation patterns. 10% do not have an opinion on whether fees had any effects on visitation patterns,



Local vs. Non-Local Visitation Remains the Same In Spite of New Fees

Park units vary in the percentage of visitors who reside in the local area. Half of the managers believe local area residents account for 40% or less of total visitation, while the other half of managers believe local residents account for over 40% of their visitors. 80% of the managers express the opinion that there were no major changes in the proportion of local vs. non-local visitation since the initiation of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. 9% indicate the balance between local and non-local visitation has changed, and the remaining managers were unable to detect a change.

Community and Visitor Reaction to Fee Program is Favorable

Managers express the opinion that the local business community, local area citizens and local park users were most likely to shift their views about the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. According to the NPS managers, 21 % of local residents changed their opinion on the Fee Demonstration Program. Collectively, 44% of managers indicate local residents were positive, while 26% of managers indicate residents were neutral. The remaining managers were unable to determine a shift in residential views on the program. The impression of managers is that visitors are supportive of the fee program if funds collected remain in the unit where they were generated and are supportive of these funds being used to provide improved facilities and visitor services.

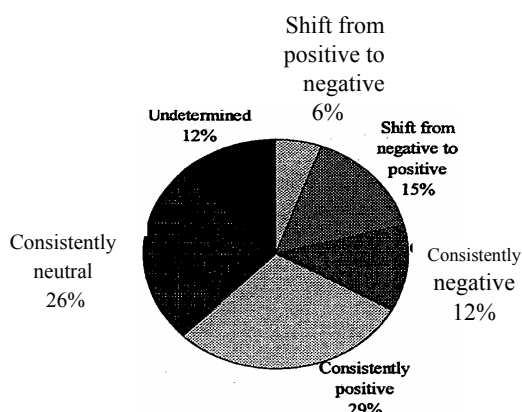


Figure 1: Managers' Views About Local Area Park Users' Reactions to the Fee Demonstration Program

IMPACT OF RECREATIONAL FEE DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM ON PARK OPERATIONS AND FEE MANAGEMENT

Fee Program has a Positive Effect on Park Base Budgets

60% of managers have a positive view of the contribution of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program on their park's base budget situation. These managers indicate the program allows for greater flexibility in the allocation of their base budgets. 34% of park managers indicate that the program had no effect on their base budget. These managers attribute this fact to the newness of the program. 6% indicate that there have been somewhat negative effects on base budgets, citing start-up costs and program operating expenses.

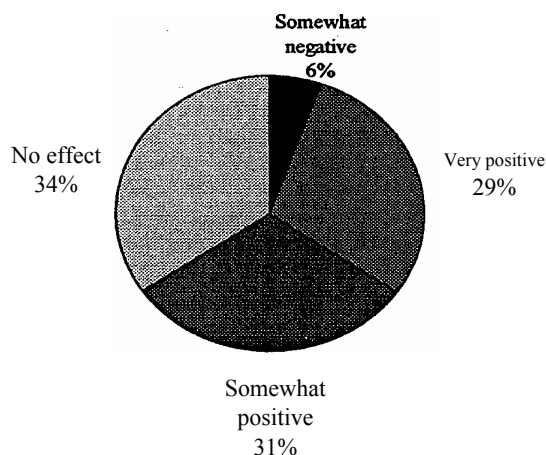


Figure 2. Managers' Views About Effects of the Fee Demonstration Program on Their Unit's Base Budget

Managers See Positive Effects on Quality of Visitor Services

43% of managers indicate the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program improves the quality of visitor information services at their parks. These managers believe there is general improvement in funding availability and spending flexibility, which they attribute to the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. 28% of the managers indicate there have been improvements in visitor facilities. 29% of the managers indicate visitor center operations have improved.

Delays in Transfer of Fees to Parks Have Been Overcome

63% of managers say they did not receive funds in time to be spent during fiscal year 1997 (FY97), a key problem in implementing the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. Of this group, 25% of the managers attribute allocation delays to park-level management, another 25% attribute delays to regional-level management, and the remaining 50% attribute the problem to national-level management. Nevertheless, 65% of all participating units report receiving their funds in sufficient time to utilize them effectively for use in FY98.

Fee Program Funds Are Being Used for Priority Projects

At the beginning of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program, park managers were required to identify proposed projects for which additional fees collected would be used. 80% of managers indicate funds were expended on priority maintenance, infrastructure and resource management projects. However, in 1997 two areas of park operations stand out in terms of receiving the majority of funding emphasis from the Fee Demonstration Program: infrastructure and information services. In addition, 67% of the units utilized some funds to support the operation of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. 25% of the participating parks report that projects funded had been previously identified in their General Management Plan.

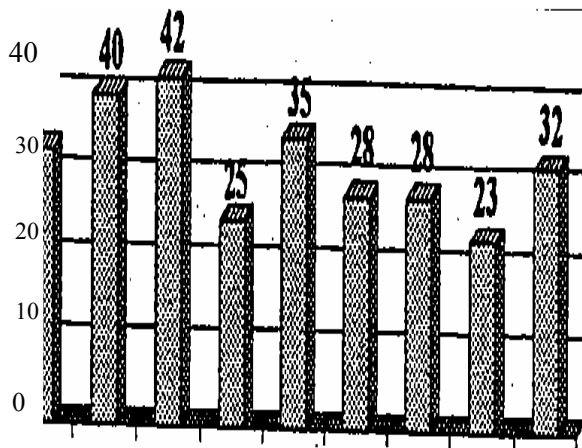


Figure 3. Managers' Responses About Various Uses of FY97 Fee Demonstration Program Revenues

What is Happening in 1998

Managers were asked to speculate on their allocation of fee monies in 1998. 90% of managers anticipate allocating fees to priority backloged projects. Park managers appear to be consistent in their plans for 1998, building upon work and programs supported by the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program in 1997. The number of units indicating they will finance new or additional visitor services projects in 1998 increases to 40% of participating units. 69% of the units indicate they will continue to use a portion of the funds to operate the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program.

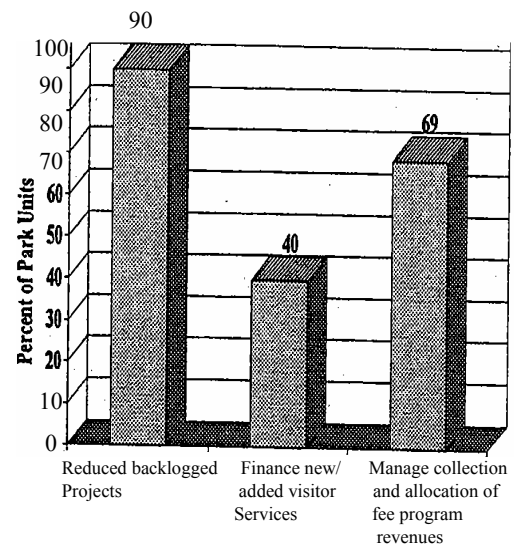


Figure 4. Managers' Responses Regarding Planned Uses for FY98 Fee Demonstration Program Revenues

END NOTES

Study Methods

The purposes of this research were:

- to assess NPS management personnel reaction to the implementation and operation of the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program;
- to assess management perceptions of efficiency of the program, including costs of management, revenues and impact on visitation; and
- to assess how funds generated from the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program were used within park units.

During May 1998, questionnaires were mailed to all NPS units participating in the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program. Follow-up letters and phone calls were made until a 100% response rate from participating parks was achieved. While 100 park units had been authorized in the NPS Recreational Fee Demonstration Program, several units participated jointly in the program. Therefore, a total of 109 surveys were returned for analysis.

Related Literature

Luloff, A.E., Richard S. Krannich, Donald R. Field and Cristina Pratt.. 1998. *Assessment of the National Park Service Fee Demonstration Program*. First Annual Report to the National Park Service, submitted to the Cooperative Parks Studies Unit, University of Idaho, Moscow.

Lundgren, A.L., and D.W. Lime, 1997. *Overview of a 1997 National Park Service monitoring study to obtain visitor reactions to the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program*. Final report submitted to National Park Service Midwest Region, National Fee Program and Social Science Program. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, Department of Forest Resources, Cooperative Park Studies Unit.

Lundgren, A.L., D. W. Lime, CA. Warzecha, and J.L. Thompson. 1997. *Monitoring 1997 park visitor reactions to the National Park Service Recreational Fee Demonstration Program*. Research Summary. St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, Department of Forest Resources, Cooperative Park Studies Unit.

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